

she was happy for being elected and her experience would help her serve better this time. She said before I had decided to become a candidate I spoke to the elderly people and my family who all supported me in the election. Kohliur Begum said that despite her second election she faced many difficulties but man-

Rashida Begum, Sufia Begum and Bilkis Begum are three newly elected members at Rajbari Union of Gazipur district, who expressed their reactions to our correspondents.

Rashida Begum (40) said she did published eight thousands black and white poster. She also

she faces difficulty in doing her job she would contact the higher officials. Bilkis said one she is elected member of the UP. it does not matter whether she is from the reserve seat or not. She opined that without a reserve seat very few women could be interested in contesting such a hazardous election. Employment

that demand. Rashida said that it would not have been possible to win the election without her husband and father-in-law's support. She is grateful to all of them. As a member she would try to make sure that people are getting their share provided by the government under different projects.

# The Two Ws-A Fate Intertwined

Ayesha Hossain

**C**AN you spare us, water? was one woman's plea. Who would have thought that the long cherished dream of slaving for water would remain a dream. The fate of women is intertwined with water, they can not be separated on a day to day basis. For decades rural women had to collect drinking water from far away distances—a basic necessity. The carrying load though tremendous was forgotten in the well being of the family health. Both women and young girls had to fetch water. In many cases, girl children had to fore go attending school because of fetching water from far. Water was collected twice, once in the morning and again in the evening. They were blessed with the comfort of having tubewells sunk nearby. A blessing indeed. This reduced their physical work of carrying water for drinking and the maternal work of caring for their sick children.

A typical family usually comprises of five members. On an average they would need 4-5 kalash (pitchers) of water for drinking and cooking purposes. (A kalash usually holds 5-6 gallons of water). This fetching of water was an additional burden for the women folk. Women folk were credited and looked up as versatile being. Little thought was given to the impact this was having on their health. No time to think about these. Diarrhoea related to the drinking water was taking heavy toll.

As time passed by, the government realised that increasing incidence of mortality relates to diarrhoea. This was a cause for alarm for policy makers. Local Government Rural Development and Cooperatives initiated a programme to reduce the incidence of diarrhoea related mortal-

ity especially among children. The Government of Bangladesh along with other countries (Donors) started a national programme of diarrhoeal awareness. In order to visualise this objective, tubewells were being installed to give access to safe drinking water for the rural community. It should be mentioned that water is not the only

ing diarrhoea.

Women folk were happy and excited that the source of drinking water was within their reach now! No more long distance fetching! Even, those families who could not afford to have tubewell collected water from their nearest neighbour who had a tubewell. It was their dream come true. They had access to

With the passage of time men were brought into co—sharing the fetching water with their wives and families. Involving men into this process of fetching water from a distance was a pain staking effort. Men had no time for what they saw as a frivolous task. It was only with the tenacious and "softly softly" approach of the awareness and training programmes that led men to participate in this daily activity. Some men resented this change whilst other men welcomed this sharing change and gladly participated in the collection of water.

cause of diarrhoea. Sanitation and personal hygiene also plays an important part. Gradually, a massive programme was initiated over time and met with massive success. Tubewells, shallow and deep, were installed in locations earmarked by the concerned people. NGOs joined hands with the Government in the life saving diarrhoeal programme. This concerted effort by the partners resulted in conquer-

safe drinking water within their reach. This had reduced their every day burden of carrying water for drinking and cooking from long distance. Overall, rural community had access to safe drinking water. What a relief!!

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pain staking effort. Men had no time for what they saw as a frivolous task. It was only with the tenacious and "softly softly" approach of the awareness and training programmes that led men to participate in this daily activity. Some men resented this change whilst other men welcomed this sharing change and gladly participated in the collection of water.

Making access of safe drinking water to the community was not enough. The community needed to address water management—i.e. storage and maintenance of water. Little was done in that respect given that mortality from diarrhoeal diseases have been vastly reduced. It would appear that Diarrhoea has been conquered.

What was a dream come true has now soured. The water from the tubewell has in many parts of the country is now cursed with arsenic. Diarrhoea has been replaced by another more deadly and socially debilitating disease—arsenic poisoning. Long after this discovery, rural community are drinking and cooking water from tubewells installed in their homes or in nearby. For some it is back to the bad old days—fetching water from a distance. Whether this impacts on the girl children staying away from school is the question. Technology has not reduced the gender imbalance! It merely shifts them. The new health equation should be defined as.

Define safe water—medical cost—anxiety free health= healthy rural community

It is now time to reinvent the diarrhoeal programme with a difference: all sectors join hands, make a concerted effort and produce a similar effort.

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